Union Seminary Feb. 8th 1841

To The Society of Inquiry
of Princeton Theol. Seminary

Dear Brethren.

Your welcome epistle of Jan 9th was received, & read before our Society at its last meeting; and agreeably to a resolution to that effect we now proceed to answer it. And first permit us to say that we most cordially reciprocate the kindly & christian feelings, which are so warmly expressed in your letter. And farther that we highly prize the privileges of a christian correspondence, & believe that if rightly conducted, it will prove a blessing to all concerned. If christians of old were commended in proportion as they spake often one to another, surely we, who are looking forward to the awfully responsible work of the holy ministry, ought to have frequent communications one with another: else how can we bear one another's burdens, or share each others joys, & so fulfil the law of Christ. Surely if there were a more free interchange of thoughts & feelings; a more intimate acquaintance with each others joys & sorrows, encouragements & discouragments among ministers of the gospel, and those expecting to become such, there would not be such a tendency to impugn the motives, or to say hard things of those who differ ~~differ~~ from us in minor points. And by minor points we mean those which do not endanger the salvation of the soul. Were we better acquainted with each other, and one should err, or go astray, we would be better prepared to restore such an one in the spirit of meekness & of love: better enabled to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. While we rejoice at the good which has resulted from the acts of 37 & 8, we lament the evils which have attended them — in the separation ~~of~~ & estrangement of brethren, the division of Churches whose faith is the same, & in the bitterness of feeling manifested by some who profess to be the followers of the meek & lowly Jesus. But we trust all will eventually work for good to our beloved Church, & that, being purged from her dross, she will arise & shine, her light being come. We share your feelings in view of the stand our Church has taken in regard to Missions: the Church as such, ought to be a Missionary Society, & we ~~s~~ rejoice that now she is so; & pray that she may be greatly instrumental in building up the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. This organization we greatly prefer to voluntary societies; and believe the command, "Go ye into all the world & preach the gospel to every creature", applies to the Church

as such, as well as to individuals. Oh that our beloved Church may fully meet the deeply solemn responsibilities which she has thus acknowleged! And in order to this, her ministers & those looking forward to be such, must themselves possess much of the Missionary spirit, and they must faithfully & frequently bring the subject before their people, & make them acquainted with the wants of the world: their duty in regard to this thing should be enforced by the authority of Him, who has said, "The silver, & the Gold is mine & the cattle upon a thousand hills"

We rejoice to hear that there is such a goodly number at your Seminary, and that you are in the ~~en~~ enjoyment of outward blessings, & not altogether destitute of spiritual ones. It is to be deeply lamented, that the ~~condition of the~~ Foreign Missionary Board is not in a more flourishing condition: but we hope that reproach upon our Zion will soon be wiped away, & that She may truly become the light of the world. Our present number in connection with the Seminary is only twenty one of whom is out teaching now: yet this is better than nothing - better than it has been before for several years.

There is a good degree of union & harmony of feeling among us; though we have to lament our leanness, and our want of the spirit of active piety, which should characterize the followers of Jesus, much more those who expect to minister at the altar. Our meetings of Society are attended to on the first day of every month while in session, sometimes with a good degree of interest. They are usually attended by the Professors with their families, & some few of the neighbors. In regard to the state of religious feeling among us, we have to say it is far from what it should be: we have to lament a cold and lukewarm spirit: there is too much of a tendency to rest in the form of Godliness without feeling the power thereof: there is not that general spirit of earnest & importunate prayer which we ought to have in order to be useful: and hence our barrenness. We are doing but little for sinners around us: & we fear but comparatively little prayer is offered for their conversion.

Yet we hope for better times: some are striving to become more entirely transformed into the likeness of our Savior Jesus, and to feel more deeply their obligations to be wholly for him. We regret also to say that the Missionary spirit is low among us, but this follows as a matter of course from the low state of piety here; for the one is a

pretty good index of the other. We know of but one of the Students who is looking forward with a hope to be permitted to labor in some foreign field. But with the state of things around us such as it is, we can scarcely hope to see many fitting themselves for the foreign field. We mean the lamentable condition of the black population of the South generally, as well as of Va. There is here & there one Minister of our Church who devotes a small part of his time to the slaves. The great mass of the slaves have no special instruction in religion; if they go to Church occasionally well - if not, it is as well with most. This state of things is most lamentable: the Church seems to be asleep in regard to her duty on this point; though we would fain hope there is an increasing interest felt by many on this subject. Two of the brethren preached weekly to the slaves during last summer, in the College Church, & the attendance was generally pretty good; but on the approach of cold weather it was discontinued, & has not been commenced again as yet. The state of religion in the Churches generally is very low: but in some few Churches in Va. there have been revivals within the last year of more or less power. In the College Church vital piety was probably never lower than at present: the principal cause of this is doubtless their own unfaithfulness: but the secondary ones may be, first, they are without a Pastor & have been for more than a year; second, the strifes & divisions, which have taken place within the same time. A part of the Church has gone off from the old one, & formed one of their own in connexion with the New School at the South. In controversy & division there is usually not much of the Spirit of Christ, & of course sinners will not be converted to God. The Monthly Concert is observed in the College Church usually, or rather in the Seny. Chapel: but we fear that few Churches do observe the day as a day of prayer for the heathen. We write sad things, & things over which we ought to weep & mourn: but we may not say smooth things, when facts will not justify us in so doing. There seems to be a generally increasing confidence in, and love for the Boards of our Church in this region: they are generally recommended by Presbyteries & Synods to the support of the Churches; and what is given to those objects by members in our Communion is given through the Boards of the Church. We doubt not, that the Board of Publication will yet exert a happy influence throughout this part of our beloved Country.

We are all in the enjoyment of health & every needed temporal blessing; may that we may be abundantly supplied with spiritual blessings. Desiring an interest in your prayers for all necessary grace to fit us for the great work to which we are looking forward; & striving to fit ourselves by human learning; we pray that the same may be vouchsafed to you, that God would have you in his holy keeping, & make you & us all able ministers of the Gospel, & ~~preserve~~ preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom.

Received Feby. 16th 1841
Answ Dec 1841
Chs M Lowrie

Society of Inquiry
Princeton Theol. Seminary
New Jersey

With these wishes & prayers, dear Brethren, we remain
yours in the bonds of christians love,
In behalf of the Society of Inquiry —

James A. Lewis
Colin Shaw
Edward Hines
} Cor. Com.